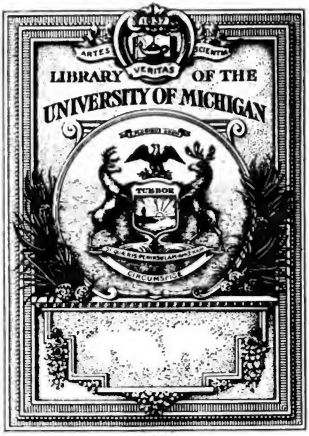
The battle of Trafalgar

Philip Howard Colomb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THE BATTLE OF TRAFALGAR.*

By (the Late) Vice-Admiral P. H. Colomb.

Some of my reviewers have been recently taking me to task because I have expressed the opinion that the battle of Trafalgar has never yet been critically examined, or its true conditions set forth, and yet have not shown in what respects, or on what grounds, my views differ from those who have preceded me in description. Although, when I have written as above, I have been almost obliged to go as far as I then went, yet the conditions under which I wrote equally compelled me to hold my hand, and prevented me from pressing the matter further.

But I sympathise with the reviewers, for I think it is aggravating when a writer challenges accepted opinions, and yet fails to explain the nature of his challenge. So I propose in this paper to expose the grounds of my challenge, and to advance some of the chief evidences by which I support it. What I do here must be the merest outline, for both space and time would fail me were I to attempt to treat the question as fully as it deserves.

I must observe that it is an easy task to critically destroy most of the descriptions of the battle, and most of the illustrative diagrams that have come down to us, because it is plain that the critical faculty has scarcely been stirred in their preparation. The most glaring discrepancies in fact and evidence have been passed by as if there were no need to try and reconcile them. It is impossible to understand the nature of a naval battle unless a diagram to some kind of scale is constructed. But no such diagram of Trafalgar has ever, I believe, been published, and if in any existing diagram an attempt be made to imagine such a scale as a ship's length, it will generally be found to bring out absurd contrarieties.

Then there has been little attempt to apply a scale to evidence. Evidence of the third or fourth class is allowed to displace evidence of the first class, and the result is incongruity and sometimes sheer impossibility. There is little or no attempt to apply

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the known or probable motions of the ships through the water, to explain or illustrate different movements or positions, and the result is that movements and positions which are most improbable are calmly recorded.

There has been no proper appeal to the signal-books on each side in order to see what orders were given, and how they would naturally have been obeyed. The result has been that some of the most important orders by signal that were given before the battle have been left out of sight altogether; or if they have been recorded, a wrong interpretation has been put upon them because the language of the signal-book has not been followed.

But all these subsidiary charges culminate in the one great charge that I bring against historians. They have one and all combined to destroy Nelson's character as a tactician. They have agreed, in spite of first-class evidence to the contrary, to show that Nelson on the 21st October, and practically all his officers, entirely forgot his order of the 9th of the same month, and made the attack, in what it is hardly too much to say was in the worst possible way. This has come about from thinking of Nelson as if he were only a sort of first captain of the *Victory*, and forgetting that the skill of an admiral consists in selecting the method of approach, and the point or points of attack. As the historians almost universally represent it, Nelson's approach was distinctly faulty, and there was very little sense in the selection of the points of attack. Both of them were made in opposition to the arrangements of the 9th October, and yet historians are oblivious of the duty that lies on them to explain how Nelson so completely parted with his wits on the 21st.

Without question, James is responsible for much of our ineffective thinking over the battle of Trafalgar. If a naval battle is to be intelligently described, its conduct must be divided into five stages or phases, namely:—(1) the aims of the commanders; (2) the position at the time when the two fleets sighted one another; (3) the method of approach; (4) the points of attack—all these four things being the admiral's part to deal with—and (5) the *mêlée;* which belongs to the captains or other subordinates. James's influence has put away from our minds almost every stage of the battle of Trafalgar except the final one. It is only within the last few years that we have come to understand his vast incapacity for taking broad and comprehensive views, and for linking cause and effect in the chain of events. But I think his delight in getting away from any contemplation of the battle of Trafalgar, as a battle, and from any attempt to trace cause and effect as between Nelson's order on the 9th and his acts on the 21st, so as to come to matters of such

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excessive detail that they confuse or destroy all general conceptions, is plain beyond telling. No one can miss it, who looks for it. Yet James hardly misrepresented the action of cause and effect in the battle; he simply left it out of account. It is the blind guidance of James that has misled us, because it was so long before we became aware that he was blind.

To come now to close quarters with our subject, we may begin by asking why have our historians and diagram-makers so unanimously agreed to throw over Collingwood's despatch, and instead of taking it for their guide and framework, have built up their stories and their pictures almost as if the despatch had never been written? Here it is, as far as the British tactics of the battle are concerned.

"As the mode of our attack had been previously determined on, and communicated to the flag-officers and captains, few signals were necessary, and none were made, except to direct close order as the lines bore down.

"The Commander-in-Chief in the *Victory* led the weather column; and the *Royal Sovereign*, which bore my flag, the lee.

"The action began at twelve o'clock by the leading ships of the columns breaking through the enemy's line, the Commander-in-Chief about the tenth ship from the van, the second in command about the twelfth from the rear, leaving the van of the enemy unoccupied; *the succeeding ships breaking through in all parts, astern of their leaders*,* and engaging the enemy at the muzzles of their guns, the conflict was severe."

Evidently this is but a paraphrase of Nelson's memorandum of the 9th October. Collingwood was quite unaware that he, or any one else in the fleet, had departed from the principles there laid down.

In their broadest and plainest terms the principles stood thus, leaving out of question the reserve squadron, which was not of the essence of the plan, and depended on the number of ships that the Admiral might have at his disposal. (1) The approach was to be in the order of sailing in two columns. (2) The ships in both lines were to "bear up together" to effect it. (3) The two divisions were to consider the enemy's fleet—supposed to be ranged in line-of-battle ahead—as divided into three parts, of which the rear and centre were to be numerically inferior to each of the British divisions, while the van part of the enemy's line might be of any strength which was left by these requirements. If the enemy had 46 sail, no less than 20 might be allowed to the van part, so that the two rear parts might be about twenty-five per cent. weaker than each

* The italics are my own.

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of the British divisions. The lee division of the British was to fight the rear part of the enemy's line, as near as might be ship for ship, with the surplus acting as might be found most useful. Nelson happened to mention—thinking of 46 sail in the enemy's line—that the rear part would be 12 ships. The weather division was to fight the centre of the enemy's line, also as near as might be ship for ship, with the surplus acting as most required. The van part of the enemy's line was to be left out of the account, as it was held that, so left alone, it must stand on for some distance before it could tack or wear to weather on the British ships, and so put them between two fires. But this was also to be guarded against by the British ships "cutting through" the line, and generally engaging to leeward. In such positions the enemy's van ships would be much hampered in any attack by the fear of injuring their friends. But in any case Nelson considered that before the van could make any such attack, ample time would have been left to dispose of the enemy's centre and rear; after which the van could be separately dealt with.

Now, when the numbers came to be 27 to 33, instead of the 40 to 46 that Nelson had supposed, a very fair carrying out of his principle would have divided the enemy's fleet into three parts of 11 ships each, so the 14 ships should take one 11, 13 ships another 11, while the third 11 in the van should be let go free. There would have been no sense in putting a lee division of (say) 14 ships on to 16 or 17 of the enemy's; the weather division of (say) 13 ships on to 4 or 5 of the enemy's, while a van of 12 or 13 ships should have been let go free.

Now take any diagram we please—I have eight or nine before me as I write—and we shall see that they all ignore pretty equally Collingwood's despatch and Nelson's order. None of them notice the separation of the van; and no sense is conveyed of a general breaking through the centre and rear of the enemy's line in all its parts, and an engagement to leeward; nor is any hint given of the later attack by the enemy's van, while the approach is made in the worst possible way—in very confused lines ahead, nearly at right angles to the enemy's line, while the leaders of the columns are brought so close together that there is not room for the weather division to deploy. The most reasonable diagram, and the one nearest the truth, is probably also the earliest. It is that published in the UNITED SERVICE MAGAZINE for July, 1894.* Though not rigidly correct, it is fairly so, and does not lose sight of the tactical

* "An Original Letter from the *Victory* after Trafalgar:" page 322, U. S. M., July, 1894.—ED. U. S. M.

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position, or make a fool of Nelson. All the others are really travesties of the battle. And my charge against the historians is that they have been in such a hurry to come to the details of the *mêlée* that they have made the approach to it—which was Nelson's part—ridiculous.

So far, as I have already observed, my destructive task is easy. I have said what no one could help saying on the grounds given. Even that most uncritical of critics, Admiral Ekins, is conscious of great discrepancies, though, after his manner, he is content to leave them as he found them.

But I shall be told that my position is untenable, because it is impossible to suppose that writer after writer could have gone on all these years misapprehending and misrepresenting plain facts. The answers to be made are, that, reasonable or not, the thing is so; but that it is not so unreasonable to suppose it. It is rather a thing to be expected and looked for. In regard to naval battles, the critical faculty is rarely exerted in those who describe them. No historian has yet described the battle of Beachy Head except vaguely, and falsely; though there is no naval battle as to which the evidence is clearer or more complete. The earliest published diagram of Trafalgar, printed in the *Naval Chronicle* for November, 1805, is absurd. It was drawn by some one who had no notion of the facts, and who could not have used them if he had known them, because of his utter ignorance of the nature of fleets and their management. Yet it was stated that Villeneuve had vouched for its correctness, and Ekins took it quite seriously. I reproduce it here in proof of what I say.

To come to a case in our own time. I have beside me five or six diagrams of the battle of Yalu. Only one of them, from an early Japanese source, represents a reasonable approach, or one agreeable to the data. All the others represent Ito as coming from a quarter from which he certainly never came, and having got him there, make a perfect fool of him as a tactician, by causing him, when an attack on the Chinese left wing was glaringly open to him, to drag his fleet all across the Chinese front, under their severest fire, in order to attack their right wing. Scale has been used in no diagram, and its absence has allowed absurd views to prevail.

Coming now to the more difficult task of reconstruction, it may be well to support Collingwood's lucid and easy description of the battle, by the contemporary description found in the log of the *Orion*.

"12.35," says this document, "the *Royal Sovereign* broke the enemy's rear; the larboard division attacking the remainder of the rear as they arrived up in succession. The *Victory*, after

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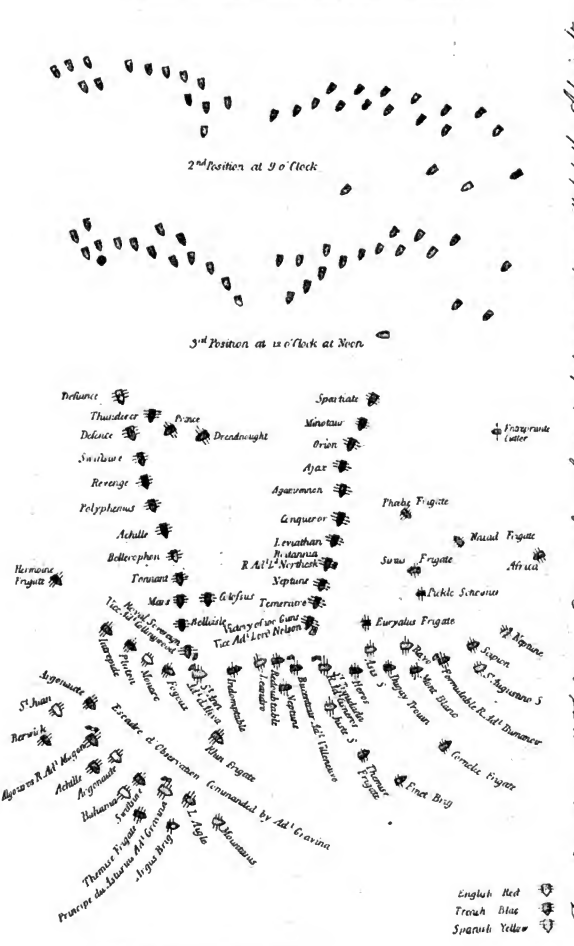
Plate I.

Plan of the Action off Trafalgar. Engraved from the original drawing at present in the possession of the Admiralty.



making a feint of attacking their van, hauled to starboard so as to reach their centre, and then turn (?) round pass under the lee of the *Bucentaur* (?). Each ship of our fleet passed through the enemy's line with studding sails set as she arrived up in succession." This shows that there was, in the approach and the attack, a full reference to, and reliance on, Nelson's original order, and that no proper diagram can be constructed which does not also refer to, and rely on that order.

The aim of Nelson as a commander has been sufficiently set forth, and it is quite as well established that Villeneuve aimed at fighting a defensive battle, with his fleet stretched out in one long line ahead.

It is also clear from Nelson's order that he intended to bear down upon the enemy's line, with his own two lines about parallel to each other, and to it. All the histories and diagrams make him go down in two lines that were nearly at right angles to the enemy's line.

The question is, did he alter his plan? or are the diagrams all wrong? Ekins, dimly conscious of the difficulty, refers to the above diagram that I have reproduced, and says that in this diagram "it is shown that the British fleet bore down . . . in two columns" (*i.e.* in lines ahead and nearly at right angles to the enemy's line) "led by the flag-officers respectively. . . . While such must be considered as the actual mode of attack adopted, it is well known to all the captains of that fleet that an attack from the windward was, from previous concert, to have been of a different and still more formidable nature. . . . The preconcerted plan of attack differed essentially from the real one, inasmuch as that presumes the two lines to have borne up together. In the actual case, they *afterwards* fell into line ahead, the ships in the wake of each other, in obedience to the signal made in conformity with a change of intention on the part of Lord Nelson. This, it would seem, can only be accounted for by his great impatience to be the leader of his column, and the first in battle, for certain it is that such change *was made* in the form of attack, the writer having been assured of it from the best authority." *

Now, where is the critical acumen in these remarks? Ekins knew very well that soon after six o'clock in the morning, when the British fleet was in the order of sailing in two columns, by the wind on the port tack, and heading about N.N.E., the *Victory* made the signal, "76; compass E.N.E.," of which the signification was: "When lying to, or sailing by the wind, to bear up and sail large, on the

* Ekins' 'Naval Battles,' p. 289. The italics are in the original.

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course steered by the Admiral, or that pointed out by signal." The signal was to bear up *together* and steer E.N.E., and there was no other signal "to bear up" in the signal-book. The result of it could only be that the magnetic bearings and the distances apart of the ships remained just what they were, but the ships in column, instead of steering N.N.E. in a line astern of one another, were steering E.N.E. in a line upon one another's starboard quarters. These lines would be parallel to one another, and to the enemy's line when it was on the port tack. That is to say, the order of the 9th October was carried out, except that Nelson bore up earlier than he had originally intended.

It is clear that we want some very strong evidence to show that this state of things was altered, and if we found it we must receive it with great caution, because it would testify to the changing of a very good tactical position for a very bad one. What evidence does Ekins, for instance, offer us? He offers the diagram from the *Naval Chronicle;* "the best authority;" and Nelson's impatience. The diagram is absurd; the "best authority" would be to show that a signal ordering the columns to form lines ahead was made; and as Nelson was in either case the leader of his column, it is impossible that his desire to be leader could have influenced him in making such a signal.* The negative evidence is therefore against the idea that the "lines of bearing," in which the two columns started, were ever altered intentionally.

I have spoken of gradations in evidence, and we must put the logs and despatches in the first class. But I do not think that either can be relied on as exact. It would be very strange if, in the hurry and excitement of the time, any one would be cool enough to take exact notes, unless, as at the battle of Beachy Head, some officer had been told off to do that and nothing else. So we cannot well set up any single note in a log, or any single sentence in a despatch, as standing alone, and defying criticism. We must rather take a good many entries and a good many sentences, and deduce from them an hypothesis which best satisfies the general conditions. Entries and sentences are subject to an inquiry as to whether they are congruous with other evidence, and with likelihood. In comparing the logs we see that there is considerable divergence in the entries. The times do not quite agree; nor the courses steered; nor the winds noted; nor the scanty and scattered reports of the signals made. And in the case of Collingwood's despatch, we see at once that there is no attempt in it to be more than generally accurate. But then if we take a good many entries together, and,

* Nelson mentions such a signal, but the bearing and distance of the *Royal Sovereign* from the *Victory* remained as they had been at six o'clock.

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as it were, mean them, we see a convergence towards what a consideration of all the conditions would lead us to expect.

As to this question of whether Nelson did indeed deliberately destroy a good tactical position in order to adopt a bad one, as Ekins thinks he did, a casual glance at the *Temeraire's* log might have confirmed him, had he gone no further. For she records the *Victory* as making the signal 72, the command "to form the order of sailing in two columns" at 6.38 A.M., the order "to bear up together" having been given half an hour earlier. Such a signal would have placed each column in line-ahead, would have caused the *Royal Sovereign* to shorten sail, and would have brought up the *Victory* abreast of her. The question is whether this is a mistaken entry? That such an order was incongruous, goes without saying. It is certain that it was not obeyed, as far as the *Royal Sovereign* was concerned. Several later signals are recorded which were proper to make in "lines of bearing," but not in "lines ahead." It is certain that the ships, as time went on, steered more to the eastward, and that the wind tended to haul round from N.W. towards S.W. The *Temeraire* herself records that about 8 o'clock the *Victory* made the signal 50, an order "to maintain the larboard line of bearing though the ships were on the starboard tack." Very soon afterwards the *Victory* is recorded as making the signal to the *Prince* to "bear up," a likely signal in "line of bearing," unlikely in "line-ahead." Not long after, the *Royal Sovereign* is recorded as making signal 42, for "the lee division to form the larboard line of bearing," and following it up by a signal to the *Belleisle* to bear S.W. of her. The whole group of signals is against the correctness of the *Temeraire's* entry, and some little searching, with this fact in mind, shows us that Lieutenant Cumby, the first lieutenant of the *Bellerophon*, records that at 6.42 she answered the general signal No. 76 with the "compass signal, East"—a signal for "altering course together to East." We know that the fleet did alter course to the eastward; we know it must have done it to close the enemy; it was a congruous order, and we may be certain that the master of the *Temeraire* entered 72 when he should have entered 76.

We come now to the position of the fleets after daylight on the 21st, when they first made out the situation clearly, or, to be exact, at 6.10 when the signal to bear up was made.

This is shown in Plate II. drawn to a scale of half an inch to a mile. The lines V and R represent the British fleet as it would have been, supposing all the ships were in their proper stations. They were in the "order of sailing in two columns," steering N.N.E. by the wind. The line AB represents the Franco-Spanish fleet in "line-ahead," stretching to the south-westward. According to the

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Scale ½ inch to 1 Mile.

Plate II.

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British tactics, our columns would have been a mile and a half apart, while the ships in column would have been two cables, or one-fifth of a mile, apart. According to the French signal-book the ships in the allied line would have been one cable, or one-tenth of a mile, apart. These measurements would have extended the British lines to about two and a half, and the allied line to about three and a half miles.

Nelson, in this position, noted the bearings of the extremes of the enemy's fleet as being East and E.S.E. His note is confirmed by other officers, who recorded the centre of the enemy's fleet as bearing E. by S. Other observers in the *Victory* estimated the distance of the enemy—that would be, of the enemy's centre—as ten or eleven miles. The plate shows us that if these various statements were correct, the Franco-Spanish line was a mile and a half longer than it ought to have been ; but this is nothing against the other facts, as every one who has been used to sailing fleets knows that it would have been very difficult to maintain the close order directed, and that the tendency of such a line as the enemy's would have been to extend, and to straggle, not to close up.

When the British fleet bore up together and steered E.N.E. under all possible sail, they only made a knot and a half speed. The enemy, by the wind, or near it, could not have made more than one knot per hour.

The British only steered E.N.E. for about half an hour. It is evident that the course was too much to the northward, and at 6.40, as we have seen, Nelson altered it by signal to East. If we lay out these courses and speeds, we get the British columns at 8.30 as placed at V2 and R2, the leaders and rear ships having steered the courses marked by the dotted lines, the ships between them having steered on parallel courses. By that time the enemy's line would have advanced so that the van ship would have reached near the point C and the rear ship near the point D.

I have drawn these positions and movements as if they were precise and accurate, as it is the only method by which we can maintain correct ideas of what took place. But of course there was much inaccuracy and much straggling on both sides, though not, I am sure, the monstrous disorder that the diagram-makers represent, because they have never taken the trouble to use scale. There is, for instance, some reason to suppose that the original N.N.E. and S.S.W. "lines of bearing" in our fleet became gradually more like lines lying N.E. and S.W., though they probably recovered on nearing the enemy. Lines of bearing are extremely difficult to maintain under sail, even after much practice, and our fleet had had no practice. The signals made to individual ships show that they

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required much whipping up, but I think they are all congruous to the "line of bearing" and not to the "line-ahead." The natural straggling tendency would be for the rear ships to drop back, and then in regaining station the helms would be starboarded in such a way as to alter the lie of the lines as I have described. But it is not to me possible to conceive that Nelson or Collingwood should have concurred intentionally in turning lines that followed Nelson's order by being nearly parallel to the enemy's line, into others that were nearly perpendicular to it. Collingwood, by his despatch and his signals, has left it quite clear that he at least did not concur. The viciousness of such a movement comes out still more strongly when we examine the manœuvre ordered by Villeneuve at 8.30.

The order was "to wear together and form line-of-battle on the port tack."

Theoretically, when wearing together in line-ahead, the movement is simultaneous for all the ships. Practically, it must begin with the rear ship, and no ship in the line can begin to wear until her next astern has shown that she is moving round. In a line of 33 ships the leading ship could not hope to begin to wear until long after the rear ship had completed the movement. On this occasion, with so very light a wind, the wearing of each ship must have been a very slow process. But apart from these delays, which we must not forget, the change in the lie of the line from about S.W. and N.E. to about N.N.W. and S.S.E., made necessary by the change in the wind, was in itself a movement occupying time.

For suppose in Plate III. that BA is the Franco-Spanish line lying S.W. and N.E., five miles long; then the new line, when formed, would lie from A to C or from A to D, according to whether we suppose the rear ship at A, when she hauled to the wind, went on, or stopped where she was. In the first case, the ships as they wore would steer for A, the point that the rear ship had left, not to haul their wind till they got there. In the second case, the van ship at B would steer for the point D, and haul her wind when she got there; the remaining ships steering in parallel lines to her course for their places in the new line. This is the theory of the thing, and it is apparent that besides the delays in beginning to wear and wearing, there is in this case a run of five miles or more for the new rear ship before the new line-of-battle could be formed.

Suppose Villeneuve made the signal at 8.30, and the ships could only sail a knot an hour, it becomes certain that Villeneuve's new line could not possibly have been formed by noon. The van part would have been formed as far as E, in the first case, but the

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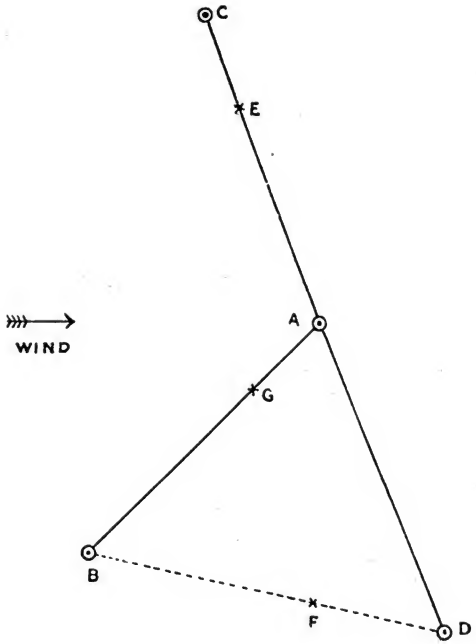

Scale $\frac{3}{4}$ inch to 1 Mile

Plate III.

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rear part would still have been running down to their places in the new line, with the rear ship at G. In the second case, the rear ship would only have reached F. The result must have been what Collingwood noticed, that the line was bent to the eastward. But besides this effect it is manifest that if a line of 33 ships was in the most perfect order on the one tack, the signal to "wear together"—especially if the wind were very light—would have thrown the line into considerable confusion on the new tack. Thus the bent position of the line and the doubling up of the ships, attributed by Collingwood to design, were in the one case an inevitable result of the signal, and in the other, almost equally an inevitable accident.*

We are now able to make a diagram of the position at noon. It is a good hour to take, because we know that at that time the *Royal Sovereign* was only 500 or 600 yards from the twelfth ship from the enemy's rear, while the *Victory* bore N.W. from her at two miles' distance. We do not know how many ships of the enemy had not reached their places in the line of battle, but we may fairly assume that there were eight or ten in that situation. In drawing the diagram, Plate IV., we must not hope to do more than to show something like the position. We have little data that is precise, and we must make a reasonable compromise out of the evidence before us. But we have it recorded that the new allied line appeared to lie nearly north and south, and the *Royal Sovereign's* position being fixed by her proximity to the twelfth ship from the enemy's rear; the *Victory's* position is fixed by her bearing and distance from the *Royal Sovereign;* the lie of the enemy's line is fixed by the time it took the *Victory* to reach the tenth ship from the van. The lie of the rear part of the enemy's line, that part which was still running to leeward to get into line-of-battle ahead, would hardly have been N.E. and S.W. as in Plate III. There would have been a more general bearing up as the British neared, a sort of compromise between the two methods indicated in Plate III., and we may reasonably put the lie of that part of the line about N.N.E. and S.S.W. We thus see that the bearing and distance of the *Royal Sovereign* from the *Victory* gives us a base line on which the diagram may be constructed with at least an approach to accuracy. The diagram, so constructed, appears generally to fit in better with what individual ships are described as having done, than do most of the published diagrams. Take the diagram given in the seventh volume of the 'Despatches'—which, by the way, is an impossible

* There was no such formation as Collingwood supposed in the French signal-book.

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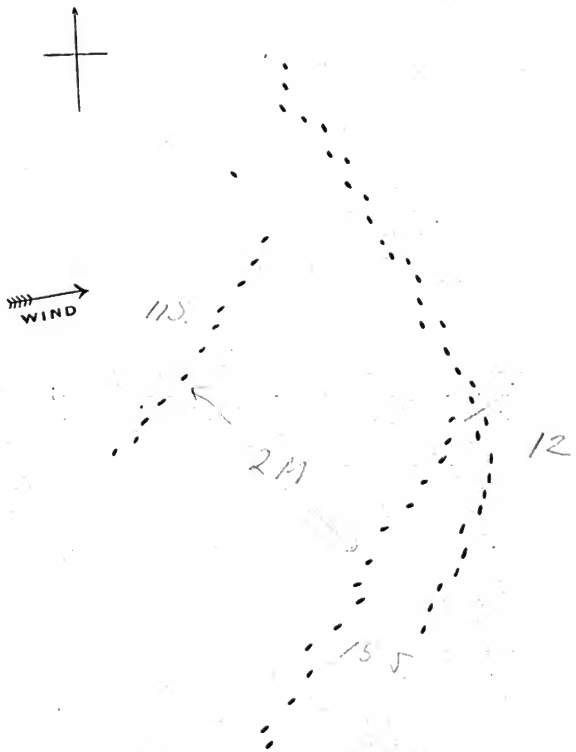
Plate IV.



Scale 1 inch to 1 Mile

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one if the direction of the wind given be taken into account—and we are puzzled to know what took the *Orion* sailing away so as to leave the *Santa Anna* and *Royal Sovereign* on her larboard hand? but in the diagram now given, we see it was a very natural course for the seventh ship in the weather column to take, and there are other puzzles of the same kind which rather cease to be puzzles when regarded in the new light.

A general survey of conditions rather inclines me to think that the Franco-Spanish line straggled and extended in the rear more than is represented, and also that the line was rather less bent, and I believe that having the base line fixed, by taking times recorded and probable speeds through the water, we might with a good deal of labour construct a diagram pretending to much greater accuracy than I have attempted. It does not seem to me at all impossible that our lines might have been at noon even more nearly parallel to the enemy's than I have placed them.

But from the positions I have given, we can understand a general and irregular pressing forward to engage "our opponents in the enemy's line"—an expression very often used in the logs and journals. And then we can see that the general nature of the battle was an enemy's van thrown out of action; a breaking through the enemy's centre and engaging ship for ship to leeward, by the weather line; while the lee line was doing the same by the enemy's rear. There is abundant evidence of our ships generally hauling their wind on the port tack after they had broken through; and this was confirmed by more than one signal later in the day.

But space compels me to hurry on to examine briefly what the effect of this attack must necessarily have been, and to show in a rough diagram the final phase of the battle, as a battle, which is easily and clearly marked. James rightly speaks of the massing of the ships in the vicinity of the *Victory* and *Royal Sovereign*, but I think he antedates it, and gives for instance the idea of a "closing like a forest" round the *Bucentaur* and the *Santissima-Trinidada*, before the *Victory* made her attack, which did not show so much until after she made her attack, she being herself in part the cause of it.

The speedy dismasting of the *Santa Anna* necessarily stopped her way, and the *Royal Sovereign* was with her in that respect. The consequence of the intrusion of the van of our lee division into the enemy's line was to block the progress of the ships astern and near at hand, but it left the ships ahead of the *Santa Anna* free to go on, which no doubt they did. Then the intrusion of the *Victory* and her immediate supports caused a like block in the leading ships of the enemy's centre, while it left nine or ten ships of

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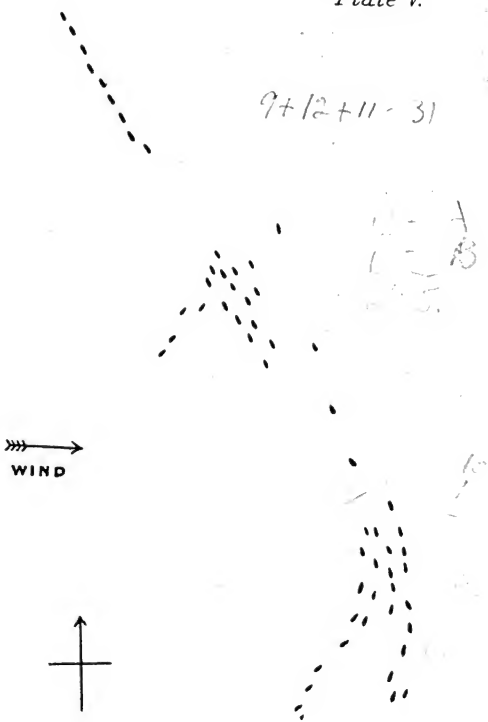
Plate V.



Scale 1 inch to 1 Mile.

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the van to stand on. That these van ships stood away some distance—a mile perhaps—before they wore to come to the rescue is clear enough. They were not observed to be wearing till after 2 P.M., and the rear ships of Nelson's column, which cut away their studding sails and hauled their wind as soon as they observed the danger, did not get into action with the headmost of the van ships until after three. The general result at about 2 P.M. was probably this. Nine or ten ships of the van, in line on the port tack, about a mile N.N.E. of the *Victory*. A confused cluster, or mass of ships, friends or foes, near the *Victory*. Then a space of possibly not less than a mile, and another mass or cluster of ships about and near the *Royal Sovereign*. The British ships generally with their heads to the northward engaging the enemy from the lee position. Ships straggling and separating on both sides of course, with a general tendency of the least damaged French and Spanish ships to make off to the eastward. In Plate V. I have just indicated what I think any one might have looked down upon from a balloon had such a person been present in that situation at about 2 P.M. on the 21st October, 1805.

My object in this paper has simply been to show that I do not think that Nelson, Collingwood, and the captains present at the battle of Trafalgar, ever lost sight of the order of the 9th, and that the success of the battle was greatly due to that fact.

P. H. COLOMB.

NOTE.—When I wrote this article I had been searching for, but had not found, a diagram of the battle of Beachy Head that was drawn by M. Renau, the officer appointed by De Tourville to take notes of the battle. I have since found it. It is drawn to scale; and any one glancing at it would certainly say that I had seen it before I drew Plate II. and had used it as my model.

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